Islamophobia

Introduction:

➢ Islamophobia is the irrational hostility, fear, or hatred of Islam, Muslims, and Islamic culture at individual, societal or state level

➢ It also connotes active discrimination against these groups or individuals within them with due process of law or without it

➢ It manifests itself through individual attitudes and behaviours, and the policies and practices of organizations and institutions.

➢ This presentation attempts to clarify the concept, analyse its underlying causes and suggests a plan of action to counter it.

What is Islamophobia?

"Islamophobia is a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure.

It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve 'civilizational rehab' of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise).

Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended."

➢ The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) defines Islamophobia as

"the fear of or prejudiced viewpoint towards Islam, Muslims and matters pertaining to them", adding that whether "it takes the shape of daily forms of racism and discrimination or more violent forms, Islamophobia is a violation of human rights and a threat to social cohesion".

History of the Term Islamophobia:

➢ First used in the early 20th century, emerging as a neologism in the 1970s. Its use increased during the 1980s and 1990s

➢ Reached public policy prominence with the report by the Runnymede Trust's Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (CBMI) in 1997.

➢ "anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item Islamophobia in the vocabulary is needed".

➢ Meaning of the term continues to be debated, and is problematic.Several scholars consider Islamophobia to be a form of xenophobia or racism.:

Dimensions of Islamophobia:

According to Khaled A. Beydoun of California Law Review Forum, Islamophobia has three dimensions: private animus, structural policy and the dialectical process

➢ **Private Islamophobia:** fear, suspicion, violent targeting of Muslims by individuals or private actors-use of religious or racial slurs, mass protests or rallies, or violence

➢ **Structural Islamophobia:** the fear and suspicion of Muslims on the part of institutions, manifested through the enactment and advancement of policies, associated with a national security threat, framed in facially neutral fashion

➢ **Dialectical Islamophobia:** the process by which state policies legitimize prevailing mis-conceptions, misrepresentations, and tropes widely held by private citizens.

Manifestations of Islamophobia:

➢ Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change.
➢ It is seen as separate and "other", not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them.
➢ It is seen as inferior to the West, barbaric, irrational, primitive & sexist.
➢ It is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, and engaged in a clash of civilizations.
➢ It is seen as a political ideology, used for political or military advantage.

Specific Acts of Islamophobia:

➢ Verbal threats/attacks on persons, Islam or their cultural/religious symbols, beliefs and practices, either face to face or through media-print, electronic or social.
➢ Physical attacks on property, places of worship, people—especially those who display visible manifestation of their religious identity such as women wearing hijab or niqab
➢ Policies or legislation that indirectly target, disproportionately affect Muslims, unduly restrict their freedom of religion, such as bans on building mosques with minarets
➢ Discrimination in education, employment, or access to public/private goods, justify such practices, exclusion from mainstream society.
➢ Ethnic and religious profiling and police abuse, including some provisions of counter terrorism policing

➢ Public pronouncements by some journalists and politicians that stigmatize Muslims as a group and disregard their positive contributions to the communities and countries in which they live.

Repeat of Pre-Nazi anti-Semitism:

There are significant similarities between Islamophobic discourse and European pre-Nazi anti-Semitism such as

- ❖ imagined threats of minority growth and domination,
- ❖ threats to traditional institutions and customs,
- ❖ skepticism of integration,
- ❖ threats to secularism,
- ❖ fears of sexual crimes,
- ❖ fears of misogyny,
- ❖ fears based on historical cultural inferiority,
- ❖ hostility to modern Western Enlightenment values, etc.

Why is Islamophobia an issue in Europe now?

- Islamophobia has been fuelled by public anxiety over immigration and integration of Muslim minorities into majority cultures in Europe.
- Exacerbated in the aftermath of the economic crash of 2007 and the rise of populist nationalist politicians.
- They have also been aggravated by high-profile terrorist attacks carried out by Muslim extremists.
- What are the implications of rising Islamophobia for the Western societies? Some of the ways they are adversely affecting them are-

Divided Society: Muslim minorities have been portrayed as non- belonging and wanting to separate themselves from the rest of society.

Government policies have failed to ensure equal rights for all, forcing unemployment, poverty, and limited civic and political participation

Rise of Populist Far Right: Minorities often serve as scapegoats in times of economic/political crisis, even where they have lived for generations.

Myth of European "Islamization" or invasion has been nurtured by xenophobic, populist parties that are on the rise across Europe. .

Tilted Policy Framework: The 9/11 terrorist attacks drastically changed public opinion towards Muslims excerbated by use of Islam by extremists

Media in Europe have succumbed to reporting based on stereotypes to stigmatize Muslim populations, informing counter-terrorism measures that restrict liberties for all and negatively impact Muslim communities.

Disintegration of European Values: Islamophobia is a "symptom of the disintegration of human values, values such as nondiscrimination, tolerance, freedom of thought, justice, solidarity, and equality.

Causes of Islamophobia:

- ❖ **Historical Memory:** Historical memory from generation to generation. Hatred against Jews for death of Jesus/against Muslims-a throwback of Crusades, invasion/occupation of many European countries.
- ❖ **Cataclysmic Events:** Terror attacks in Europe and the United States by Islamic extremists, such as 9/11, London subway, France etc
- ❖ **Mega Trends:** Increasing unemployment in Europe, increased presence of Muslims in USA/EU, emergence of global Muslim identity.

These three factors namely history, events and trends, are then exploited by vested interests such as populist leaders, xenophobic press and racist organisations.

They emotionally blackmail the general public by exaggerating the threat or perception of threat-they are killing our sons, they are taking over our jobs, they are converting our boys/girls to Islam etc.

Technological development particularly electronic media and internet has further accentuated these cultural/religious fault lines-a globalisation of anti-Muslim narratives.

Thus countries with very few Muslims, eg Czech Republic and Hungary, not only have similar narratives of anti-Muslim hatred around intrinsic terrorism, the subjugation of women and so on.are also blamed on Muslims

How to counter Islamophobia :

Need for long term coordinated, systematic, dispassionate response by all stakeholders to counter a historical and universal phenomenon

 Here is a 6-Ds plan of action

1. Define the term
2. Document Islamophobic cases
3. De-constructing & Countering the Narrative
4. Devise & Implement Strict Legal Framework
5. Do Introspection and Put House in order
6. Dialogue-Interfaith & Intra-faith

1) Define the term:

➢ Any plan of action to counter Islamophobia depends upon the perspective one has in mind regarding the reasons for its emergence

➢ If clash of religion is main reason for hatred between followers of two Abrahmic religions, then initiation of inter-faith dialogue is needed

➢ If attitudes and behaviour of Muslim minorities is cause of such feelings then onus of improving situation lies on Muslim expatriates.

➢ If terrorist activities of a few Muslims are causing rise of Islamophobic feelings, then finding causes of terrorism and their removal is needed

2) Document Islamophobic cases:

➢ Systematically collect data about incidence, frequency and intensity of Islamphobic incidents , their perpetrators and regions most affected.

➢ We will not only know the intensity of these feelings but will also know areas, groups of persons, organisations & institutions involved.

➢ This information will help the state and the concerned agencies to come up with proper policy framework and targeted action.

➢ It will also help those who want to remove misgiving by reaching out the targetted groups of people to economise on time and resources

3) De-constructing & Countering the Narrative:

➢ To effectively counter Islamophobia, we must know what type of arguments these people are presenting in support of their point of view.

➢ Identify the weaknesses of their narrative in terms of design, logic, facts and figures.

➢ Debunk it with facts and figures Come up with a positive counter narrative & highlight the contributions of Muslims in the development of the Western societies

➢ Also the contributions being made by the immigrants in accelerating the economic growth of their respective countries.

4) Devise & Implement Strict Legal Framework:

➢ Cases of Islamophobia are treated as other crimes and dealt with under the normal common laws of the Western Countries
➢ Common demand of Muslims should be to make Islamophobia utterance a cognizable offence under specially enacted laws and regulations
➢ Like they have done for Nazi slogans, anti-Semitism and Holocaust
➢ Similarly, the offenders of Islamophobic crimes must be given the same punishments as are handed over to the offenders of anti-semitism

5) Do Introspection and Put House in order:

➢ Muslims must take share of the blame where due, Make all out efforts to integrate themselves with the societies they are living in,
➢ Muslim countries should make efforts to curb extremism/terrorism from their own ranks. Check the way Muslim clerics spew out anti-West propaganda in their Friday sermons
➢ Underdevelopment, bad law & order situation and lack of peaceful conditions in Muslim majority countries are pushing out their citizens to Europe-these need to be tackled

6) Dialogue-Interfaith & Intra-faith:

➢ Constructive interaction between people of different religious tradition at individual and institutional levels has become imperative
➢ There are recorded examples of interfaith initiatives with varying levels of success in establishing understanding, and tolerance.

➢ The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, an initiative to prevent violence and support social cohesion by promoting inter-cultural and interfaith dialogue, needs to be pushed further for creating harmony among the religions and thus reduce the Islamophobia

Obama's 8 Principles of Interfaith Relations:

In 2016, President Obama outlined 8 principles of interfaith relations which can be the manifesto of Inter-faith Dialogue.

1. Visiting each other
2. Learning about others' history
3. Mutual appreciation
4. Telling the truth
5. Living up to our core theological principles and values
6. Clear-headed understanding of our enemies
7. Overcome fear
8. Solidarity.

Conclusion:

"There will be no peace among nations without peace among religions. There will be no peace among religions without dialogue among religions"

The above mentioned views of Hans King a Professor of Ecumenical Theology and President of the Global Ethic Foundation are as relevant today as they were nearly 40 years ago.